GEO-TRAVELERS AND TRAVEL PLANNING

Exploration of travel planning phases
and Montana Vacation Planner and Map   May 2010

Agenda

- A Look Back
- Travel Planning and Publications Exploratory
  - Objectives
  - Approach and Methodology
- Travel Planning – The Phases
- Deep Dive into Vacation Planner and Map
- The Road Ahead

3

A Look Back

Current Focus/Beliefs

- Publications play an important role in the planning process of potential visitors

- Guides provide accurate, colorful, easy-to-read information to visitors of all ages

- Often a potential visitor's first glimpse at what Montana has to offer, but also plays an important role in the vacation planning process

- Publications provides advertising opportunities for tourism partners

- Distribution is through chambers, visitor centers, consumer shows, conventions, local businesses and direct mail from website and advertising inquiries

Secondary Research Key Takeaways

□ Currently, the vacation planner is stretched by having to meet many objectives

□ The web is critical in providing travel planning tools as the majority of consumers plan their travel online and there is a lack of good planning tools provided by competitive destinations

□ There is a great opportunity to provide the bigger picture story of a destination in publications, both from the consumer's standpoint (high magazine and travel magazines usage) and competitive (only one other state is publishing a magazine)

□ Travelers will still need an on-the-ground resource to be able to plan on the run while they are traveling the state

Initial Recommendations

- Phase 1: Conduct Geotraveler panel study to determine how the target audience plans travel (from inspiration to execution) and what role a printed piece from a destination would play in the process

- Phase 2: Recommend revised publications plan based on primary and secondary research findings

7 Travel Planning and Publications Exploratory

Our Objectives

Gain insight into travel planning process by identifying phases and resources used

Understand the role of publications like the MTOT vacation planner in travel planning

Gather reactions to current MTOT publications (planner and map) and translate into actionable insights

Identify differences between Geo-cores and Geo-potentials

Approach and Methodology

Two Concurrent Blogs

One among Geo-Cores (18 participants)

One among Geo-Potentials (15 participants

- Private blog

- Each blog lasted for approximately 7 days

- Three Phases

  - Travel Plans and Phases of Planning

  - All about Destinations

  - MTOT Publications

- Approximately 3-4 questions in each phase

Approach and Methodology

Five In-Depth Interviews

- 30-45 minute telephone interviews
- Participants chosen from blogs based on upcoming travel plans/recent travel
- Deeper line of questioning about:
  - travel planning phases and resources
  - as well as travel planners and MTOT Vacation Planner; more specifics

Who is the Geo-Traveler

- Seek out experiences that make their world bigger

- Fighting against the homogenization of experience

- Motivated by what makes one place distinct from another

- Global Citizen

- Green Awareness and Green Behaviors

Defining the Audiences

GEO-TRAVELERS
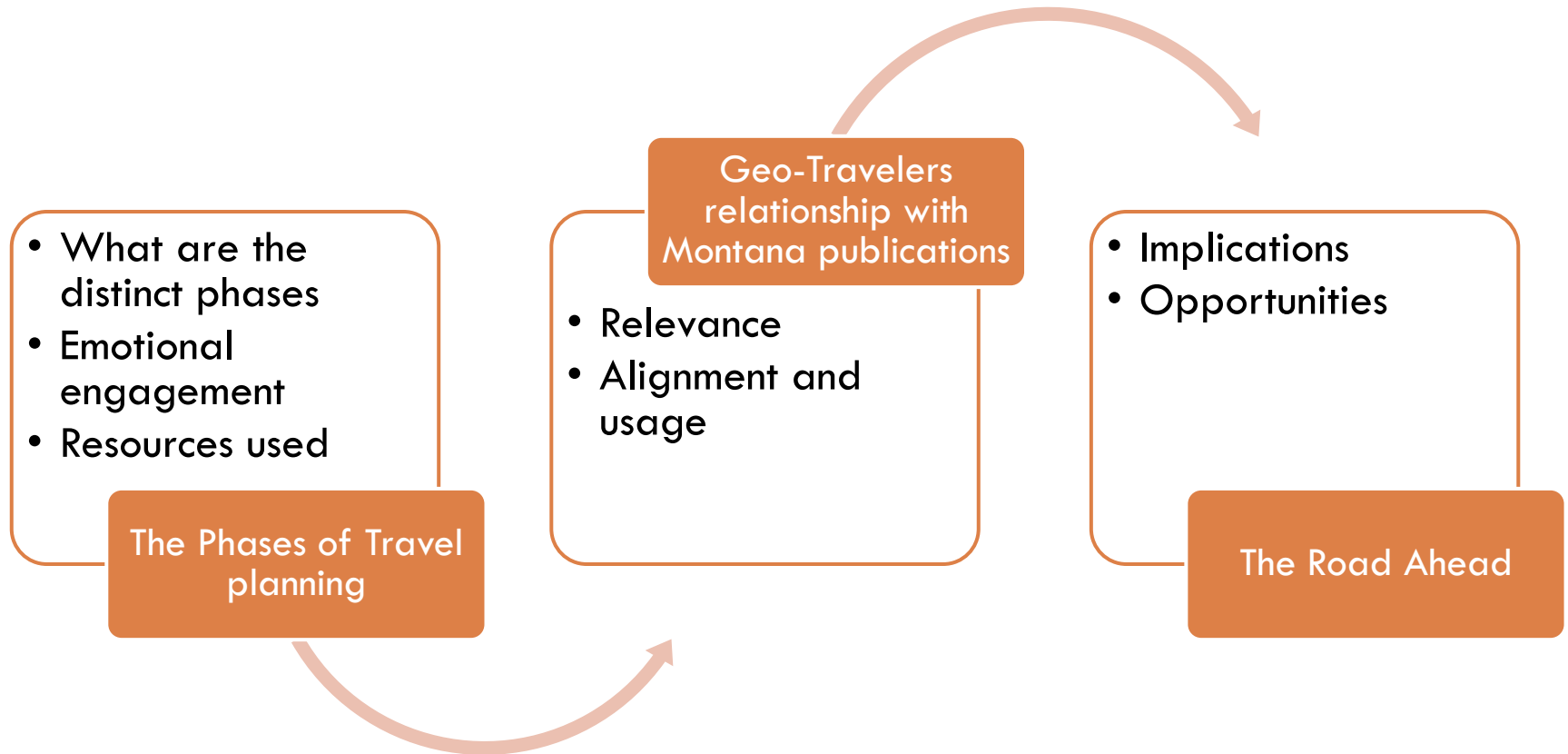### United by a shared set of beliefs and values about travel and the environment.

Geo-Cores	Geo-Potentials
• Lifestage with higher income, but less flexibility in terms of time • More intense alignment with attitudes/behaviors	• Lifestage with greater flexibility in terms of time and responsibilities, but lower household income • Less intense alignment with attitudes and behaviors

Road Map

- What are the distinct phases
- Emotional engagement
- Resources used

The Phases of Travel planning

Geo-Travelers relationship with Montana publications

- Relevance
- Alignment and usage

- Implications
- Opportunities

The Road Ahead

How we plan travel has changed

The old way: manual, multiple steps, required assistance

The new way: digital, direct and personal

Travel Planners: Points to the Past

- Genre of travel planners represents the way things used to be
- Geo-Travelers are sophisticated and embrace a newer way
- No one mentioned using travel planners as a current planning tool

Key Phases – Travel Planning

Where to go   **How to get there**   **Where to stay**   **What to do**

Each phase can be defined by and indentified by emotional engagement, actions taken and resources used.

Key Phases – Travel Planning

Where to go   **How to get there**   **Where to stay**   **What to do**

I get my travel inspiration from SO many places . . . Friends, something I see on TV, travel mags, travel books/guides . . . Love all things travel . . . I've torn travel articles out of mags, newspapers, etc. (even have a file for these). –Amy (Geo-Core)

Phase One: Destination Decisions

Where to go

Emotional Connection: Not fully invested yet. Trip is still a thought, a dream, a wish. This is where inspiration happens. The spark of an idea for a trip.

What they're doing: Beginning to plot the trip on a calendar. Does the trip fit, where will it fit into the reality of their lives? Where can it fit?

Resources: almost anything – friends, family, magazines, movies, travel guides, hobbies/interests, calendar . . . The story.

Destinations also driven by type of trip

- Events

- Hobbies/Interests

- Friends/Family

- Geographical Wonder/Landmark

- Short v. Long

- Domestic v. International

- Dirty v. clean

Phase Two: How to Get There

Where to go   **How to get there**   **Where to stay**   **What to do**

So the first phase is deciding where to go. The second phase is making airline and car accommodations and I absolutely HATE this . . . . - Scott (Geo-Core)

After I've purchased the tickets (be it train, plane or bus), the trip is now REAL, and I get really excited. – Heather (Geo-Potential)

Phase Two: How to Get There

How to get there

Emotional Connection: Execution of this phase is tedious, but the payoff is excitement. They've made an investment, are now committed and that the trip is now a real event.

What they're doing: Logistical, tactical and transactional. Focused on deal hunting and getting the best value for their desired schedule.

Resources: Mostly online via transportation/carrier websites and aggregators. Transportation resources.

Main Resource: Internet

Allows them to be in as much control as possible.

Once transportation is booked, they are emotionally invested

It depends but we start generally with an airline ticket or sometimes a lodging reservation for at least part of the trip. Sort of an anchor to hold us to a date and a place. We have committed! – Becca (Geo-Core)

Phase Three: Where to Stay

Where to go   **How to get there**   **Where to stay**   **What to do**

I like to research hotels to death, since I'm always worried the grass will be greener on the other side. So, I normally look for the hotels on Expedia and then look at their individual hotel website and then check comments on Trip Advisor. – Ron (Geo-Core)

Phase Three: Where to stay

Where to stay

Emotional: Excitement builds as they begin to create a personal experience, their unique experience.

What They're Doing: Review choices based on cost and location.

Resources: Internet
Website or phone reservation
WOM/Personal recommendations
Books/guides/magazines
Social media/reviews

Travelers not Tourists

☐ Most of all, they trust and rely on resources that share their travel perspective and values.

Once I figure out where I'm going, especially if it's somewhere that I'm not visiting someone, I starting asking people I know if they've been there recently, places to stay . . .

- Elissa (Geo-Potential)

I have a wide spectrum of resources I use . . . Books, websites, friends . . . All are just one of many because not everyone travels the way I travel. — Trenton (Geo-Core)

Some improvise more than others

□ Some are willing to book accommodations once they get there, others have all lodging booked

If I am visiting a place where I do not know anyone, I usually book the first night's accommodations in advance by finding something in my travel guide. However, that's as far as it goes.

— *Mariah (Geo-Core)*

It can take me 1-7 days to get through this phase. I live on Google. I search for hotels through more localized websites, native to the city/country.

— *Khartoon (Geo-Potential)*

Key difference: Geo-potentials more likely to stay with friends and family

Result of life-stage

AND

Kinds of trips Geo-Potentials
take (group travel, impromptu,
weekend get-aways)

Being a recent graduate, I'm on a super tight budget, so most of my travel has been visiting friends or with my family. – Rose (Geo-Potential)

Where to stay: Momentum building for the trip

The process of trying to find "the best place/the best price" is tedious in some ways, but I think I enjoy the process . . . I like the exploration of just reading online and seeing where others have stayed and their impressions.

– Becca (Geo-Core)

Phase Four: What to do

Where to go   **How to get there**   **Where to stay**   **What to do**

I now look to the internet to find out more information about specific places. I tend to shy away from any official promotional sites in favor of first-person accounts– blogs, forum comments and reviews. I feel this information is much more transparent and it's more important to me to see the if the people recommending a place share my interests and perspective. – Trenton (Geo-Core)

Phase Four: What to do

What to do

Emotional: Deeply invested and attached. This is their experience.

What they're doing: Finding the balance between structure and improvisation and what is actually do-able.
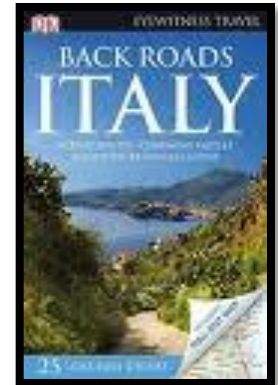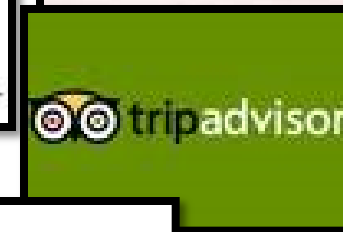
Resources: Internet
Books/guides/magazines
Social media/reviews
WOM/Recommendations
Local websites
Local publications/magazines
Locals

Pre-trip discovery— a wide range of resources

- WOM/recommendations
- Social media/reviews
- Magazines/articles
- Travel books/guides
- Chamber of Commerce/local websites
- Locals

Constant discovery

This phase never really ends– it is a constant state of discovery which begins before they depart and continues throughout the trip and even afterwards.

When traveling, I tend not to over-plan as to not be disappointed if I don't get something accomplished. When you fly by the seat of your pants you always find something amazing that you wouldn't have if you stuck to a strict schedule.
– Elizabeth (Geo-Potential)

Best resources for "what to do" have depth and dimension

They give the 'why', they tell a story . . .

That's what I like about the Lonely Planet guides . . . They have those little boxes, special stories, a little blurb about why I should go there or see that or what's worth experiencing. There's a depth, some perspective and it's like finding little treasures, little gems. – Mariah (Geo-Core)

During the trip: Locals are most valuable resource

- "Who knows better where to go than the people who live there"
- Want to go where locals go
- Travelers not tourists
- Use of emergent technology to access local content and further their sense of discovery

> *I have also used Facebook and Myspace to meet up with locals . . . or just find out about the best beaches or the best kept secrets of the city.*
>
> *— Kyle (Geo-Potential)*

> *My most trusted guides are always locals! Whether I know them or not, they always know the best places to go. Even though I am when I travel, I don't like to be a tourist.*
>
> *— Elizabeth (Geo-Potential)*

Key Differences:
Geo-Cores v. Geo-Potentials

Geo-Cores

- More likely to plan for traditional accommodations/book lodging
- Longer trips
- Family trips (children, extended family)

Geo-Potentials

- More likely to stay with friends/family during trips
- Shorter, often more impromptu-trips
- Or, trips around weddings and other rites of passage

Travel Planning: Emotional Roadmap

Where to go	How to get there	Where to stay	What to do

All about imagination and possibility

Tedious and uninspiring

Begins to get personal

Beginning of the experience. Focus on Discovery.

Trip becomes real

Deep Dive into Vacation Planner and Map

39

What is their role and where do they go?

Where to go   **How to get there**   **Where to stay**   **What to do**

Hypothesis: The planner and map might be of use in multiple phases—
especially in the "where to go", "where to stay" and "what to do" phases.

Reality Check

The vacation planner as a genre and more specifically, the Montana Vacation Planner, have limited relevance for the Geo-Traveler.

I, too, have not used one of these planning guides, mainly because I use the internet to find this kind of information. – Carey (Geo-Potential)

I have not used these types of brochures before (I know my parents have) . . . I just wouldn't order them….I rely more on the internet to research a trip. I also like guide books (Lonely Planet, Rough Guide, Luxe) & tend to use my iPhone apps (AroundMe, etc.) for 'emergency' planning situations. – Amy (Geo-Core)

Planner is a symbol of the past . . .

And doesn't connect with the Geo-Traveler and how they plan and travel now.

- Geo-cores more likely to have past experience with a planner like this or to have used one before, but . . .
- Geo-potentials have almost no frame of reference

I think the only time I would really use one of these is after I already arrived in a particular location (at the hotel?), but this is just for informational purposes and would not affect my trip planning.

– Scott (Geo-Core)

I hate to say it, but these types of printed publications seem dated to me. - Lora (Geo-Core)

The last time I remember ordering these kinds of resources from a state was for my state project in fifth grade.
– Elissa (Geo-Potential)

Cynicism around the genre impacts usage and consideration

- Advertising/paid placement system undermines authenticity and credibility

- "Not a resource for me" – tourist v. traveler

- Large advertising section overshadows any interesting content and puts the publication out of alignment with Geo-Traveler's sensibilities and values.

I think [these types of planners] tend to be overly heavy on the ads and faux articles, so they haven't felt super valuable to me (whereas a guide book like Lonely Planet, say, or the travel section of the NYTimes feels full of authentic information.) Also, doing so much online research makes something like this feel obsolete. – Liz (Geo-Core)

I think I wouldn't use the Montana Vacation Planner because I would think that the things in it would be too touristy and therefore everyone would know about them. – Rose (Geo-Potential)

Initial reaction . . . 'wow this looks cool' . . . It has a nice glossy cover with an amazing picture . . . Then when you open it up it was like 'gotcha!' All I saw were the listings of different hotels and restaurants and immediately thought 'oh tourist crap.' – Cale (Geo-Potential)

Use of (so much) paper begs other questions

- Sustainable and Environmentally friendly?
  - Best use of resources? A real concern for some geo-travelers
- Are printed materials most current?

PAPER: All that said, this is an abusive use of paper. These planners should be produced in short runs and distributed thoughtfully to reduce environmental impact.

— John (Geo-Potential)

However, I have to join in with other commenters and say I'd feel guilty ordering this hardcopy and wasting paper when I could've looked at the same info online. I looked on the back and was happy to see that it's printed on recycled paper. Good for you, Montana!

— Heather (Geo-Potential)

That's one disadvantage of printed material — it can become outdated quickly, whereas information on the web can be updated daily, even hourly. — Kathleen (Geo-Core)

Visuals are inspiring, but need more

☐ Power of images

☐ Images play a critical role allowing geo-travelers to envision themselves there; "insert your story here"

Love the photos and imagery. They are sophisticated and beautiful. Right away I think…I have to go there!
            - Betsy (Geo-Core)

What I like about the planner. DEFINITELY the pictures. They're gorgeous. They DO make me want to take my line to some hidden creek and stay there for hours.
            – Callie (Geo-Potential)

Itinerary and Calendars Tap Into Geo-Traveler Sensibilities

- Both are tools that allow them to picture themselves in a place, taking part in an activity

- Calendar and Itineraries make it personal and speak directly to the Geo-Traveler's desire for local and specific content

- More authentic and useful as they have some context

I also like the "Mark your calendar" section and the "Pack your Itinerary" sections. This is more the info that I would want out of a vacation guide since I want more big picture of where to go and the "highlights" of a place – why people go to Montana.
— Becca (Geo-Core)

I REALLY like the "Mark Your Calendar" section that appears for each part of the State. These are the kinds of things that could affect WHEN you took a trip . . .
— Scott (Geo-Core)

Planner driving interest in digital content

Digital content becomes the destination for more personal experience

- Visitmt.com and other links
- Podcasts
- Sample itineraries
- Seek out more information on web

I also liked the links that are incorporated into the planner. For instance, the link to Montana Backroads lead me to discover more that I can do, such as music festivals and Iceberg Lake. Since those links are in bold, I picked up on them and used my computer as a companion resource. I am ashamed to admit that I was not reading too much of the text. – John (Geo-Potential)

I also found it pretty noble to include podcasts in the planner!
- Elizabeth (Geo-Potential)

At first, my biggest complaint was that the planner didn't contain any actual sample itineraries, but then I noticed that it sent you to the website that actually did provide you with sample itineraries. This is a huge selling point for me. – Ron (Geo-Core)

Providing context about areas is real and meaningful

- Information about areas and geography are desirable and useful
- Distinction of place becomes more local
- Visual and creates context

Loved the way it was broken up regionally — that's helpful and works with the way we really do think about and organize travel. The County Gems were nice.
— Liz (Geo-Core)

I appreciate the fact that the overall map describing the regions on pages 6 and 7 give the page numbers where the individual regional information can be found later in the booklet.
— Linda (Geo-Core)

Map is useful and practical

- Even more specific
- Portable
- Essential
- Matter of fact; Not trying to sell anything
- Again, importance of orientation and place

As for the map…..you can never go wrong with a map! I loved it and stared at it and learned routes and connected highways to some I've known or am familiar with . . . a map does what it does….shows you land and it's relative place in the country. It's more informational than anything. – Khartoon (Geo-Potential)

I will always love maps though too. They are easy to carry around and help you get yourself from place to place.
– Rose (Geo-Potential)

I like the map . . . Going green is great, but a map feels good in your hand and is good for notes, tracking, and memories if you like to write and draw.
– Kari Anne (Geo-Core)

Planner still not a 'go to' resource during planning

I do think this is a great brochure & map BUT it is something I would see my parents using more than myself. – Amy (Geo-Core)

I've never ordered publications like these — and I'd be unlikely to since I feel really comfortable with my travel planning systems. I have picked up and/or read packets like these at hotels or rest stops on occasion. – Liz (Geo-Core)

Travelers envision using the planner AFTER arrival

- ☐ They are receptive to some of the content if they came across it after arrival

- ☐ Points of 'interception/reception' might be airport kiosks, hotel lobbies, transportation venues, etc.

I would never order them, but if on a road trip I would pick them up at the Visitor's Centers. I enjoy looking through them though, and the book might influence where to eat or stay along the way. – Lora (Geo-Core)

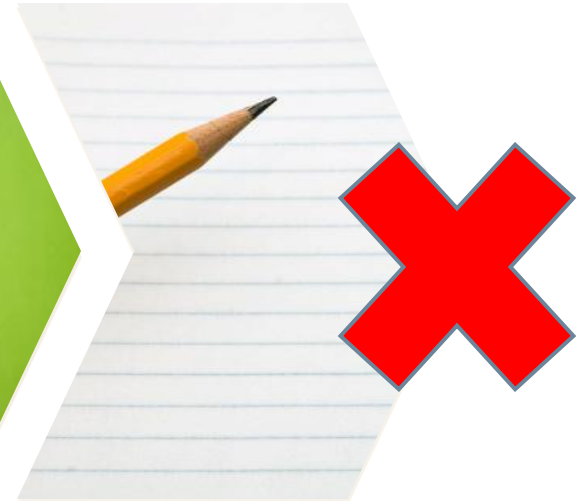# Vacation Planner and Map: The Reality

Where to go	How to get there	Where to stay	What to do

Vacation Planner and Map aren't sought after resources.
Currently considered and imagined as limited resources after arrival,
if discovered.

Vacation Planner and Map: The Opportunity

Where to go **How to get there** **Where to stay** **What to do**

Re-imagine and redesign current tools to meet and anticipate specific needs of the Geo-Traveler during various phases.

The Road Ahead

Making the Connection

- Tell your story

- Convey expertise

- Everything is local

- Appeal to "insider" aspect

- Integrate mindfulness/sustainability into your business

From *The Essential Geo-Traveler* deck, March 2009.

Insight to Opportunities

Insight

- Geo-Travelers plan their travel using the internet and online resources.
- Planner in current incarnation is not reaching the Geo-Traveler target nor is it considered a must-have resource.

Opportunity

- To develop a fully integrated and complimentary set of travel 'tools' that can be used at every stage of the travel planning process as well as on the ground.

Implications to Opportunities

Insight

- They want access to information and resources that reflect their world-view and way of traveling. They need ability to create their own one-of-a-kind experience.

- Aspects of the planner like alphabetical listings lack dimension and context which help Geo-Travelers prioritize and evaluate content.

- Visuals without any story or context might inspire, but fail to deliver on motivating them to action.

Opportunity

- Provide more specific and local content online. Incorporate social media aspect to provide independent editorial content and evaluation.

- Develop vehicle(s) for richer stories. Continue to drive traffic to visitmt.com so that Geo-Travelers can uncover more information about what makes each place special and *why* they should go.

Travel Planning: Ideas and Opportunities

Where to go

How to get there

Where to stay

What to do

Power of storytelling and visuals, think editorial content and providing the *why,* magazines/articles; hard copy drives to website; develop/design personal planner online; subscribe to content and alerts

Intra-state travel tips, limited influence

Online resources, reviews, forums, visuals, context and specifics

Power of story and local, specific information, integration of hard copy and digital; create and update your own planner (pdf), airport kiosks, hotels, local distribution, iPhone apps, etc.

Questions/Discussion

Next Steps

- Wait to move forward on 2011 Vacation Planner until final recommendations in place
- Week of June 14: Present revised publications plan based on research findings

GEO-TRAVELERS AND TRAVEL PLANNING

Exploration of travel planning phases and Montana Vacation Planner